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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 000425

DEPT FOR AF A A/S CARTER, SE GRATION, AF/SPG, AF/C
NSC FOR MGAVIN AND HUDSON
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN
ADDIS ABABA ALSO FOR USAU

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: SOUTH DARFUR SECURITY UPDATE, MARCH 2009

REF: A) KHARTOUM 418
B) KHARTOUM 409
C) 2008 KHARTOUM 1745

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Sudanese authorities have arrested three men in connection with the March 17 ambush and killing of one Nigerian UNAMID peacekeeper in Nyala. A spate of daylight attacks within the city has alarmed UN security, while at the same time it copes with reduced visibility in the restive state of South Darfur. Conflict between pro-regime Arab tribes continues sporadically near Tulus, and SLA/MM representatives lament that their movement now holds no territory in South Darfur following the fighting in Muhajeriya earlier this year. Civil society advocates have reported death threats and a tense environment for independent local activists in South Darfur. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) UN Department of Security and Safety (UNDSS) reported on March 25 that Sudanese authorities have arrested three individuals in connection with the March 17 killing of a UNAMID peacekeeper in Nyala. According to Will Mulders, acting head of UNDSS in Nyala, UNAMID has already begun its own investigation conducted parallel to the government efforts, with an investigation team sent from UNAMID HQ in El Fasher. Mulders reported that Sudanese police in Nyala have informed UNAMID that the three individuals are allegedly from Otash IDP camp, but have not provided any additional information.

¶3. (SBU) Sydia Blackmon of the UN Department of Security and Safety (UNDSS) in Nyala told poloff on March 18 that since the departure of INGOs from South Darfur, her office is now tracking more isolated, random security incidents than before, including ambushes and violent carjackings. Previous carjackings in and around the South Darfur capital involved warning shots and a set of signals to the driver to relinquish control of the vehicle, but the March 18 carjacking occurred in broad daylight, near a UN facility, with no warning shots fired. The March 17 ambush of the peacekeepers, which occurred as 8 Nigerian peacekeepers were returning from the forward operating base with lunch for their colleagues, also marks an alarming development because of the brazenness of the attack. Blackmon said that UNDSS will continue to review safety and security procedures for INGOs still operating in Nyala itself.

¶4. (SBU) Within the restive state of South Darfur, UNDSS has had reduced visibility on security incidents over the month of March. Following the January 2009 clashes in South Darfur between the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and Sudanese Liberation Army/Minni Minnawi (SLA/MM), UNDSS reported that neither rebel movement has a presence in the once-contested towns of Muhajeriya, Labado and Gereida, now in the grip of the Khartoum regime after many years. However, some rebel elements are still active in East Jebel Marra, in areas still held by SLA/Abdul Wahid, and the GOS has informed the INGO community in South Darfur that the Sudanese Armed Forces are conducting ongoing operations in the area near Faina, close to the intersection of the three states of Darfur. Security

concerns and the capricious nature of the GOS bureaucracy has kept UNDSS limited to one assessment trip during March 2009, to the town of Gereida, south of Nyala.

15. (SBU) Conflict erupted in March near Tulus, southwest of Nyala, between the heavily armed, pro-regime Habaniya and Falata tribes (while the Habaniya are Arabs and Falata are often considered "Africans," both have been on the Government's side during the conflict in Darfur). On March 19, one source in Nyala reported that 19 people had been killed since the conflict erupted in early March, but was unable to indicate how many of those killed were civilians, or from which tribe. On March 23, a representative of the Habaniya tribe told the Khartoum newspaper Al-Rai Al-Aam that 28 Habaniya were killed in a Falata attack on March 23. UNAMID has not been able to confirm accounts of the fighting due to decreased access and fewer points of information available in the area because of NGO expulsions.

16. (SBU) An anonymous campaign in South Darfur targeting independent local activists began in early March, according to two contacts who spoke with poloff on March 19 in Nyala. Osman Abdelmawla (protect), a lawyer with the independent Darfur Bar Association, said that following the ICC announcement on March 4, he began receiving death threats over his telephone, threatening that if he stayed in Darfur, he would be killed. Abdelmawla believes that South Darfur authorities have targeted him because he previously provided assistance to the 2005 UN Commission of Inquiry in Darfur, and met abroad in 2007 with other individuals investigating crimes in Darfur. Osman Ibrahim Abdalla (protect), coordinator for gender-based violence (GBV) programs with UNFPA in South Darfur since 2008, also reported similar telephone threats. Abdalla intends to depart Darfur within a month for other reasons in

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addition to the telephoned death threats, as he predicts that the authorities in Nyala intend to eliminate all GBV programs operating in South Darfur.

17. (SBU) Representatives of SLA/MM admitted to poloff at a March 18 meeting in Nyala that following fighting earlier this year between SLA/MM and JEM, military elements of the DPA-signatory rebel movement no longer have a presence in South Darfur. Suleiman Nourain, president of the South Darfur chapter of SLA/MM said that his office now sees their movement's potential in terms of political opposition that could counter the NCP in Nyala. Nourain continued to claim that JEM and the GOS conspired in January to displace SLA/MM from Muhajeriya and hand over the areas to the Sudanese Armed Forces. According to Nourain, his movement graciously spared Darfuris continued bloodshed by deciding not to counterattack. Nourain said the movement still maintains its offices in towns in South Darfur, and added that while the authorities tolerate the presence of the political arm of SLA/MM, opposition parties are generally suffering in Darfur and authorities allow no room for public assembly.

18. (SBU) Comment: Sudanese authorities are fortunate that Kalma IDP camp remains calm for the moment (ref A), but the brazen daylight attacks in Nyala signal an unexpected shift in a large city previously considered secure and safe. As was evident in a Post visit to Nyala in November of last year (ref C), Darfuris resident in Nyala continue to remain discouraged and demoralized in regard to security. Post is encouraged that Sudanese authorities have arrested three suspects in the March 17 ambush on the peacekeeping unit, as previous perpetrators of major violence in Darfur have gone unpunished. But we will wait to see if the perpetrators are brought to a free and fair trial before we celebrate the long-delayed renaissance of any sort of legal accountability in Darfur - for example, no one has ever been arrested for the August 2008 massacre in Kalma IDP camp by government forces.

FERNANDEZ